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## **Causes and Consequences of School Dropout in Kinshasa: Students' Perspectives before and after Dropping out**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** The question of students dropping out of school is one of the barriers to improving educational outcomes in low-income countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). So far, fewer studies have looked at students' viewpoints to understand their motivation when it comes to school dropouts.

**Aims:** This study is the first to explore the causes and consequences of school dropout in Kinshasa.

**Methods:** Primary data was collected amongst people who dropped out of school before they had completed their secondary education in Kinshasa in the DRC. One hundred fifty participants were recruited from local communities by using a convenience sample. A descriptive data analysis was conducted to understand the main reasons behind and the impact of school dropout in Kinshasa.

**Results:** Most participants (both genders: 32,6 %, males: 29.4%, and females: 35,4 %) said that they were responsible for dropping out of school. For both genders, several reasons for dropping out were reported: Peer influence (11.3%), Death of parent (10%), Academic failure (10%), Teacher's or other students' behaviours (10%), Economic reasons (9.3%), Health reasons (8.6%). For females, unwanted pregnancy, rape, or early marriage (8%), and males, being involved in sport and music (17.6%).

**Conclusions and recommendations:** The DRC government should encourage vocational education and training to reduce school dropout rates. Vocational education and training may give chance to some students who are not willing or having enough income to pursue academic education and may help those who like to learn practical skills for a quick entry into employment. More needs to be done to reduce school dropout in DR Congo and further research should focus on how to support those who are vulnerable.

**Keywords:** *School Dropout, Anti-Social Behaviour, Education In Low-Income Countries.*

## Introduction

### *School dropout in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

School dropout has become a big problem in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) over the last 30 years. Indeed, during each school year, there is a school dropout for various reasons. In this study, school dropout is associated with someone who has left school or college before they have finished their studies. For some, it could be a temporary school leave, while for others it is a final break from the education system. Direct observation made on Congolese society in general and the city of Kinshasa, unfortunately, shows that over the years, this phenomenon takes on very disturbing proportions to the point of becoming an issue within our society.

The education system in DR Congo is formed of 3 major parts: Primary school from 6 to 12 years; Secondary school from 13 to 18 years when all students have to take a national exam “Examen d’Etat”; and finally, the further education which includes university entrance. The literacy rate (people over the age of 15 that possess the skills to read and write) in DR Congo is 77.04% compared to 82.8% in the neighbouring country of the Republic of the Congo, and 94.37% in South Africa. This may suggest that the education system in DR Congo is still facing several problems including low coverage, poor quality in education, and dropout (USAID, 2019). For example, according to the USAID: 3.5 million primary school-age children are not in school, and of those who do attend, 44 percent start school late, after the age of six. Moreover, the National data indicate that only 67 percent of children who enter primary school will complete primary school (compared with a global average of 90%). Of those who reach year 6, only 75 percent will pass the primary school exit exam. A similar figure has been found in the secondary school. Some national efforts have been noticed, for example, the primary school completion rate has risen from 24.8% in 2001 to 69.7% in 2013, according to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) DRC Report 2015 (MDG, 2015).

To date, few studies have investigated the behaviours of students and in particular, the causes that lead students to drop out in DR Congo. Amongst the tiny number of studies, we have found research investigating sexual behaviour of adolescents (Mukadi, Ntambwe, Kitoko, Mwisi, & Mbayo, 2018), school climate and exposure to violence (Starkey, Aber, & Crossman, 2019), parent mental health and missed days

of school of adolescents (Glass, Kohli, Surkan, Remy, & Perrin, 2018). Interestingly, the study conducted by (Glass et al., 2018) found a negative association between children's well-being and parent mental health and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Moreover, the negative impact on children's well-being was different for boys and girls. Parent reports of symptoms of PTSD and depression had a stronger negative effect on girls' outcomes, including experienced stigma, externalizing behaviors, and missed days of school than boys (Glass et al., 2018).

Globally, several studies conducted in other countries have highlighted interesting findings of the causes of students' dropout. Previous studies have reported an association between school dropout and several factors such as pregnancy among adolescent girls in South Africa (Stoner et al., 2019), bullying behaviours in Cape Town (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008), the low level of the economic development and share of education expenditures in GDP (Andrei, Teodorescu, & Oancea, 2012), and factors like drugs, successive failures, lack of encouragement from family and school (Aber et al., 2017). Furthermore, a predicting dropouts instrument was developed in Canada to forecast dropouts in schools (Beauchemin & Lemire, 1991) to illustrate further this issue.

Researchers (Andrei et al., 2012; Janosz, 2000) agree that the problem of school dropout is multidimensional and that its causes are multiple because of individual differences (Janosz, 2000). Studies in psychology emphasise the behavioural and social-interactional dimensions, while educational researchers focus more on pedagogy and the educational environment (Janosz, 2000). Janosz organized his typology around four types of dropouts: the discreet (40%), the maladjusted (40%), the disengaged (10%), the underachievers (10%) (Janosz, 2000). Individual non-cognitive factors such as motivation and interpersonal interaction have been reported to increase school performance and reduce school dropout (Kryshko, Fleischer, Waldeyer, Wirth, & Leutner, 2020; Meens, Bakx, Klimstra, & Denissen, 2018).

### ***The Ecological approach to school dropout***

One of the plausible approaches to explain school dropout is the ecological approach which suggests the association between the students and the various systems surrounding them. The ecological approach suggests that academic achievement, school adaptation, family involvement, gender, education policies, and school environment may

play a role in school dropout (Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, 1998; Koc, Zorbaz, & Demirtas-Zorbaz).

Young people at risk of dropping out of school may have difficulties on a personal level for example if students have learning difficulties, lack of social skills, behavioural problems, and mental health conditions such as depression. Some researchers have highlighted the impact of how families affect students' success. Parents' support and level of education highly influence their child's academic success (Andrei et al., 2012). Moreover, school climate may also play a role in dropouts, especially when they are victims of mistreatment by their peers (Aber et al., 2017; Starkey et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2008).

National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students suggests several causes including Personal and behavioral problems; Learning difficulties; Low importance attached by the family to education; Attitude towards school; and Little involvement of parents (see (NISTS, 2019).

### **Aim of the study**

This study is contributing to overcome the big challenge of school dropout in low-income countries by investigating the students' viewpoints. This study looks at the causes that lead students to drop out. This research investigates students' primary ambitions before dropping out and how their views have changed.

### **Methods**

#### ***Study design and setting***

This study is a cross-sectional survey conducted among participants recruited from local communities including churches, social groups, and non-governmental associations. This research used convenience sampling because it's a first study and easy to reach our target population. Most of the participants were from the areas of Ozone, Delvaux, and UPN neighbourhoods, in the municipality of Ngaliema in the capital Kinshasa.

Churches were one of the main targets because 95.8 percent of the population in the capital Kinshasa is Christian (1.5 percent Muslim, and 1.8 percent no religious affiliation). Participants were recruited from different religious groups including Roman Catholic, Protestant,

Kimbanguist, and participants from other groups. A mixture of genders, age groups, low-income, and high-income groups were recruited.

### ***Sample and procedure***

Primary data was collected amongst people who dropped out of school before they have completed their secondary education in Kinshasa. One hundred fifty participants were recruited from local communities.

Inclusion criteria: Participants were eligible for inclusion in the study if they were 16 years and over; those who have dropped out from school for any reason; and those who could provide informed consent and can communicate.

Exclusion criteria: were excluded all those who did not meet inclusion criteria and who could not provide informed consent.

Family members and community leaders were encouraged to refer some potentials participants. In each group, we asked whether there were members who had dropped out of school for various reasons. Potential participants who were interested in the study were contacted. Those providing preliminary verbal consent were subsequently invited to a face-to-face meeting, where the information sheet and any ensuing queries were discussed. The capacity to consent was assessed continuously throughout the study. All participants were asked to provide written informed consent.

The information sheet and informed consent were obtained before the survey. Participants were informed about the study and their voluntary participation. They were informed that all information will be kept confidential and they will be identified by a study ID number. The face-to-face questionnaire took about 45 min to complete and was conducted in quiet rooms (church hall, community room) or outside away from any distractions. The survey questionnaire was completed in the location agreed by the participants, and they were allowed to ask questions to get more information.

### ***Ethical approval***

Ethics Committee Approval: the UCKIN Ethics Committee approved the study. All participants were given the information sheet about the survey and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

## ***Measurements***

Previous studies suggest that the problem of school dropout is multidimensional and could be caused by the students and the various systems surrounding them. Thus, we looked at students' viewpoints to see whether they see themselves as part of the problem or blamed others. Then, we explored further the causes and consequences of school dropout in Kinshasa. Participants were asked several questions such as:

Q.1: Who do you think is responsible for your dropout?

Is it (a) yourself, (b) your parents, (c) teachers, or (d) people around you (environment)?

Q.2: At what age did you drop out? (a) 7 to 12 years old, (b) 13 to 18 years old, (c) 19 to 25 years old, (d) Over 25 years old.

Q.3 What are the reasons/causes for your dropping out? Different options were suggested including Peer influence, Economic reasons, Death of parent/guardian, Academic failure, Distance to school, Unruliness at school, Health reasons, Unwanted pregnancy, rape or (early marriage), Teacher's or other students' behaviour, starting a job, being involved in sports/arts or another cause.

Q.4 What was your dream job before dropping out?

Q5. What do you really do after dropping out?

Q.6 What are the consequences of dropping out? Looking at your personal view, family or the society.

## ***Statistical analysis***

Descriptive Analysis has been widely used to describe, show and summarise data points in a constructive way.

A descriptive data analysis was conducted to understand students' views of the causes that lead them to drop out. It also looks at students' views before and after dropping out.



## Results

Table 1 presents the results to 6 questions:

1. Who do you think would be responsible for dropping out of school?
2. At what age did you drop out?
3. What are the reasons/causes for your dropping out?
4. What did you want to do before dropping out?
5. What have you really done since you dropped out?
6. What are the consequences of dropping out in your personal, family, and social life?

The answers are grouped by gender to investigate gender differences (see figures 1a, 1b, and 1c). Of 150 participants, 68 (45.3%) were males and 82 (54.7%) were females. The majority of participants reported that themselves (32.6%) were responsible for dropping out of school; followed by those who said that teachers were responsible (26%), and their parents (23.3%), and the remaining participants said that their entourage was responsible for dropping out of school (18%). The tendency was similar amongst males and females as the highest percentage was associated with “myself” as responsible for dropping out, followed by “teachers”, “parents” and then “entourage”.

### Who do you think would be responsible for dropping out of school?

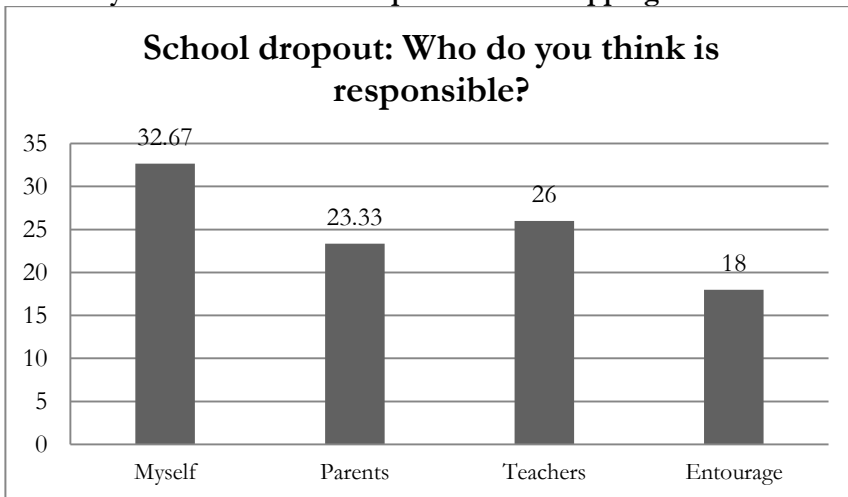


Figure 1a: School dropout: Who do you think is responsible?

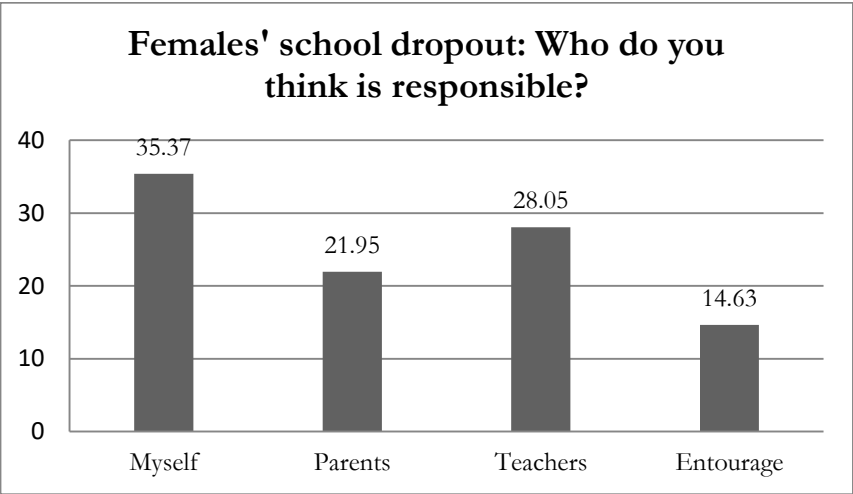


Figure 1b: Females' school dropout: Who do you think is responsible?

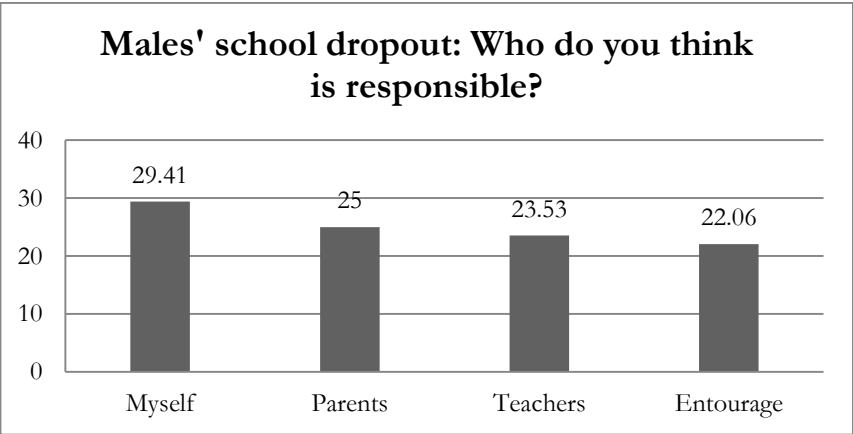


Figure 1c: Males' school dropout: Who do you think is responsible?

More males (26.4%) aged 7 to 12 dropped out of school in primary school compared to their counterpart’s females of the same age (20.7%). Nevertheless, the trend changed in secondary school were more females (26.8%) aged 13 to 18 dropped out versus 20.5% of males. After secondary school aged 19 to 25, more females dropped out 37.8% of females versus 29.4% of males. This may suggest why there are more males students at the University in DR Congo compared to females students.

For both genders, several reasons for dropping out were reported by participants including Peer influence (11.3%), Death of parent/guardian

(10%), Academic failure (10%), Teacher's or other students' behaviours (10%), Unruliness at school (9.3%), Economic reasons (9.3%), Health reasons (8.6%). For females, unwanted pregnancy, rape, or early marriage (8%), and males, being involved in sport and music (17.6%).

Before dropping out, most participants had dream careers such as Nurse (15.3%), Doctor (13.3%), Engineer/Architect (11.3%), School counsellor (11.3%), Teacher (10.6%), and lawyer (9.3%). After dropping out, most of them were working as salespeople (12.6%), police officers (12%), money changers (11.3%), and small business/small jobs (8.6%). For females, hairdressers (15.8%), and for males, security guards (11.7%).

How they feel and how they compare themselves to other people since they have dropped out of school was also examined. Most of the participants see themselves as people who lack any consideration in the eyes of others (16%), some described themselves as having an "inferiority complex" (12.6%), having "deviant behaviour" (12.6%), "depending on other family members" (12.6%), having a "lower economic capacity" (11.3%), begging (8.6%) and not able to support their children's education (8.6%) (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Causes and consequences of school dropout in Kinshasa**

<b>Who do you think would be responsible for your dropping out of school?</b>						
	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Myself	20	29.41	29	35.37	49	32.67
Parents	17	25.00	18	21.95	35	23.33
Teachers	16	23.53	23	28.05	39	26.00
Entourage	15	22.06	12	14.63	27	18.00
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
<b>At what age did you drop out?</b>						
	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
7 to 12 years old	18	26.47	17	20.73	35	23.33
13 to 18 years old	14	20.59	22	26.83	36	24.00
19 to 25 years old	20	29.41	31	37.80	51	34.00
Over 25 years old	16	23.53	12	14.63	28	18.67
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100
<b>What are the reasons / causes for your dropping out?</b>						
Reason or Cause	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Peer influence	8	11.76	9	10.98	17	11.33
Economic reasons	7	10.29	7	8.54	14	9.33
Death of parent/guardian	5	7.35	10	12.20	15	10.00
Academic failure	6	8.82	9	10.98	15	10.00
Distance to school	4	5.88	6	7.32	10	6.67
Unruliness at school	5	7.35	9	10.98	14	9.33
Health reasons	6	8.82	7	8.54	13	8.67
Unwanted pregnancy,	0	0.00	8	9.76	8	5.33

rape or (early marriage)						
Teacher's or other students' behaviour	7	10.29	8	9.76	15	10.00
Hiring in a job	5	7.35	3	3.66	8	5.33
Sports and/or arts (music)	12	17.65	4	4.88	16	10.67
Other unknown causes	3	4.41	2	2.44	5	3.33
Total	68	100.00	82	100.00	150	100.00
<b>What did you want to do before dropping out?</b>						
Dream career	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Become a doctor	8	11.76	11	13.41	20	13.33
Become a Lawyer or Magistrate	7	10.29	7	8.54	14	9.33
Become an Engineer or Architect	10	14.71	7	8.54	17	11.33
Become an Agricultural Engineer	6	8.82	5	6.10	11	7.33
Become a Sociologist	4	5.88	6	7.32	10	6.67
Become a School counsellor	7	10.29	10	12.20	17	11.33
Become a Teacher	6	8.82	10	12.20	16	10.67
Become a Nurse	9	13.24	14	17.07	23	15.33
Become a Pastor (Theologian)	6	8.82	5	6.10	11	7.33
Other profession not precisely identified	5	7.35	6	7.32	11	7.33
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100,00
<b>What you really do since you dropped out?</b>						
Actual job	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Police officers	10	14.71	12	14.63	18	12.00
Drivers/ Taximan	7	10.29	4	4.88	11	7.33
Money changers	10	14.71	7	8.54	17	11.33
Small businesses	6	8.82	7	8.54	13	8.67
Hairdressers	4	5.88	13	15.85	17	11.33
IT Professionals	7	10.29	4	4.88	11	7.33
Dressmakers or Pattern Designers	3	4.41	12	14.63	15	10.00
Sellers (store, pharmacy, etc)	7	10.29	12	14.63	19	12.67
Guard services (Security)	8	11.76	5	6.10	13	8.67
Shayeur or other small jobs	6	8.82	6	7.32	12	8.00
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100,00
<b>What are the consequences of dropping out in your personal, family and social life?</b>						
Consequences of dropping out	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%

Lack of consideration in the eyes of others	12	17.65	12	14.63	24	16.00
Inferiority complexes	9	13.24	10	12.20	19	12.67
Lower economic capacity	10	14.71	7	8.54	17	11.33
Impossibility of getting our own children to study better	6	8.82	7	8.54	13	8.67
Deviant behaviour, anti-social behaviour (drugs, kuluna , etc.)	6	8.82	13	15.85	19	12.67
Lack of self-confidence	7	10.29	4	4.88	11	7.33
Idleness or instability of life	3	4.41	12	14.63	15	10.00
Dependence on other family members	7	10.29	12	14.63	19	12.67
Begging	8	11.76	5	6.10	13	8.67
Total	68	100	82	100	150	100,00

## Discussion

This interesting study investigated the causes that lead students to drop out of school. While both males and females' participants rightly recognize that they have played a role in dropping out of school, however, they acknowledged that teachers and parents also played a role in the reasoning behind their decision to drop out of school. In line with the ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998) and previous studies (Andrei et al., 2012; Janosz, 2000; NISTS, 2019), school dropout is multidimensional. Factors such as academic achievement, school adaptation, family involvement, and school environment have played a role in school dropout (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998). In line with previous studies, this study found that parents' support stills influences children's academic success (Glass et al., 2018). Moreover, school climate may also play a role in dropouts, especially when they are victims of mistreatment by their peers (Starkey et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2008). Both psychological and educational approaches need to be considered when we are addressing school dropouts in Kinshasa. Creating a healthy educational environment can reduce anti-social behaviours and as a result reduce school dropout. The so-called maladjusted students need emotional support, motivation, and special education to integrate and contribute to society. Previous studies have reported a positive association between motivation and academic achievement (Kryshko et al., 2020; Meens et al., 2018).

Our study found that peer influence plays a key role in school dropout in Kinshasa. Peer influence is when students choose to do something they wouldn't otherwise do because they want to *fit in*, feel accepted and valued by their peers. In Kinshasa, the school environment influences on school dropouts. Participants said that teacher's or other students' behaviours and disorders at school were also responsible for them dropping out of school. An example of this is bullying, which is extremely damaging in the lives of young people regarding their confidence and self-worth which causes school dropout; a study conducted in Cape Town has reported (Townsend et al., 2008). However, studies such as the one conducted in Canada suggest a solution, with efficient school organizational structure and good management the reduction of school dropout will rise (Andrei et al., 2012; Townsend et al., 2008).

Another factor that contributes to this conversation is how teachers are paid. In DR Congo, schools mandate funds from parents for bonuses to motivate teachers, since otherwise, their wages are insufficient, therefore, many find work elsewhere. Our study found that economic reasons and the death of a parent or guardian could create more school dropouts. In DR Congo, teachers with a bachelor's degree are paid around 100 US dollars per month. A joke has been made around teachers' salaries. The government pay is extremely insufficient that many teachers called it SIDA — “Salaire Insuffisant Difficilement Acquis,” which translates as “Low wages earned with difficulty.” Thus, parents and teachers alike are concerned that the inability of the government to pay teachers living wages further deteriorates education (Nyirabihogo, 2017). This explains the lack of motivation teachers have within their teaching methods which is later translated to the approach they have towards their students. These factors all explain why numerous students drop out, as the lack of motivation and inspiration one receives from their teacher will eventually affect their confidence and productivity.

The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students has found several factors that can cause school dropouts: Personal and behavioral problems; Learning difficulties; The low importance attached by the family to education; Attitude towards school; and The little involvement of parents (NISTS, 2019). A study conducted in the EU suggests that the lack of encouragement from family and school could be causing school dropout (Andrei et al., 2012). In line with previous studies, our study found that academic failure, economic reasons, or the death of

parents/guardians were found to be another cause of school dropout (Aber et al., 2017; Andrei et al., 2012).

The psychological impact of school dropout is important in a country where the impact of wars, exposure to violence, and poverty is high and therefore, affecting people's everyday lives and their mental health. Our study found that unwanted pregnancy, rape, or early marriage was associated with school dropout. The issue of pregnancy is heightened within the study conducted among adolescent girls in South Africa which found that pregnancy was one of the school dropout causes (Stoner et al., 2019). Moreover, in DR Congo, sexual behaviour of adolescents (Mukadi et al., 2018), school climate and exposure to violence (Starkey et al., 2019), and parent mental health and missed days of school of adolescents (Glass et al., 2018) have been reported. For example, PTSD and depressive symptoms amongst parents had a stronger negative effect on girls' quality of life and boys' attendance to schools (Glass et al., 2018).

Our study found that before dropping out, most participants had dream careers such as becoming a nurse, doctor, engineer/architect, school counsellor, teacher, or lawyer. Unfortunately, after dropping out, most of them were forced to abandon their aspirations. In line with a study conducted in eastern Turkey reporting that participants were regretting dropping out as they thought that they would have had a better life if they have not dropped out (Koc et al, 2020). Some participants see themselves as people who lack any worth in the eyes of people in society, in addition to others describing themselves as having an "inferiority complex" or having "deviant behaviour". Previous studies suggest that aspirations become standards against which individuals judge themselves, thus, when goals are not achieved, people can be negatively affected mentally (Hardie, 2014). A longitudinal study amongst young people reveals a cost to falling short of one's occupational goals, which may result in more depressive symptoms for men and lower job satisfaction for both men and women (Hardie, 2014). Mental health at midlife is affected and dependent on whether their earlier career aspirations have been fulfilled. A study conducted amongst women found that women who have fallen short of their earlier career goals suffer from lower levels of purpose in life and higher levels of depression (Carr, 1997).

To conclude, school dropout is a real concern in Kinshasa and may have devastating consequences. The government, community groups, and researchers should treat this issue seriously with additional studies to explore ways to reduce rates of student dropouts in the DRC. School

dropout is multidimensional, but to address this big challenge, students, parents, teachers, researchers, and the Congolese government must be actively involved.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study has several strengths. First, this is one of the rare studies investigating the causes and consequences of school dropout in Kinshasa, DR Congo.

Second, this study informs researchers about students' ambitions before dropping out and how their views have changed after dropping out. This study will help researchers who are investigating the future of higher education in Africa.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise a few key limitations in this study. First, the small number of participants may affect the outcomes of this study. Moreover, the sample was not representative as we decided to target a specific population in the capital Kinshasa. More studies need to be done across regions.

Second, this is a cross-sectional study and no causal relationship has been investigated. Thus, a longitudinal study is needed to understand the causes of school dropout in DR Congo.

### **Recommendations**

The DRC government and community groups should treat the school dropout issue seriously and further studies should look at ways to reduce rates of student dropout in DR Congo. The DRC government should encourage vocational education and training to reduce school dropout rates. Vocational education and training may give chance to some students who are not willing or having enough income to pursue academic education and may help those who like to learn practical skills for a quick entry into employment.

More needs to be done to reduce school dropout in DR Congo and further research should focus on how to support those who are vulnerable.

Education is very important and according to the UN Millennium Development Goal 2 and taking into account the specific characteristics of DR Congo, all people should have access to primary and secondary education.



The Congolese government should allocate necessary resources to support the educational system.

### **Acknowledgments**

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### **Declaration of interests**

All authors declare no competing interests.

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